

Clifford W. Colwell Jr., MD

A Lifetime of Leadership in Orthopaedic Research, Education, and Patient Care

Dr. Clifford W. Colwell Jr. built a distinguished career advancing orthopaedic research, education, joint reconstruction, and patient care.

Professional Leadership

Clifford W. Colwell Jr., MD, is medical director of the Shiley Center for Orthopaedic Research and Education at Scripps Clinic in La Jolla, California, and holds the Donald and Darlene Shiley Chair in Orthopaedic Research. He is clinical professor in the Department of Orthopaedics and Rehabilitation at the University of California, San Diego School of Medicine, and adjunct clinical professor in the Department of Basic Science and Clinical Research at The Scripps Research Institute.

Previously, Dr. Colwell served as chief of the Orthopaedic Division at Scripps Clinic and director of the Lower Extremity Reconstruction Fellowship Program. For 25 years, he was also team physician for the San Diego Padres.

Education and Military Service

Dr. Colwell received his medical degree from the University of Michigan and completed a two-year general surgery residency at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. He completed his orthopaedic residency at the Hospital for Special Surgery in New York City, followed by a trauma fellowship at Los Angeles County Hospital.

From 1968 to 1970, during the Vietnam conflict, he served in the military at Carswell Air Force Base in Fort Worth, Texas. He then joined a private orthopaedic practice in La Jolla, California, where he worked from 1970 to 1977.

Building Orthopaedics at Scripps

In 1977, Dr. Colwell was recruited to develop the Department of Orthopaedic Surgery at The Scripps Medical Group. He served as chair from 1977 through 2002, helping establish and lead a program devoted to orthopaedic care, research, and education.

His career at Scripps also included leadership in lower-extremity reconstruction and sustained collaboration across clinical and basic-science research.

Honors and Scientific Contributions

Dr. Colwell has received numerous honors for his work. He twice received the Francis West Award for outstanding contributions to the education of orthopaedic residents at the University of California, San Diego. His other distinctions include The Knee Society Award; two Nicolas Andry Awards from the Association of Bone and Joint Surgeons; the Western Orthopaedic Association Founding Father Distinguished Service Award; and the HAP Paul Award from the International Society for Technology in Arthroplasty for “Tibial Forces Measured in Vivo after Total Knee Arthroplasty.”

He also received the Kappa Delta Award from the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons for work on cartilage injury, chondrocyte apoptosis, and matrix degradation; the Best Paper Award from the Association of Bone and Joint Surgeons for dynamic intraoperative ligament balancing in total knee arthroplasty; and The Knee Society's Chitranjan Ranawat and Mark Coventry awards for research on in vivo knee forces after total knee arthroplasty.

Distinguished Recognition

The Hospital for Special Surgery honored Dr. Colwell with its Distinguished Alumni Award in 2008, recognizing exemplary leadership and distinction in a professional specialty. In 2009, he received the Lifetime Achievement Award from the International Society for Technology in Arthroplasty.

In 2011, he earned a second Nicolas Andry Award for "Lab-In-A-Knee: Simultaneous Measurement of In Vivo Forces and Kinematics," as well as a multimedia award for research on the incidence of squeaking after ceramic-on-ceramic total hip arthroplasty.

Dr. Colwell has authored 264 peer-reviewed papers, written more than 19 book chapters, and spoken at symposia around the world.

Dr. Colwell lives in the White Sands retirement community in La Jolla, California, with his wife of 64 years, Carolyn. They have three children and seven grandchildren.

